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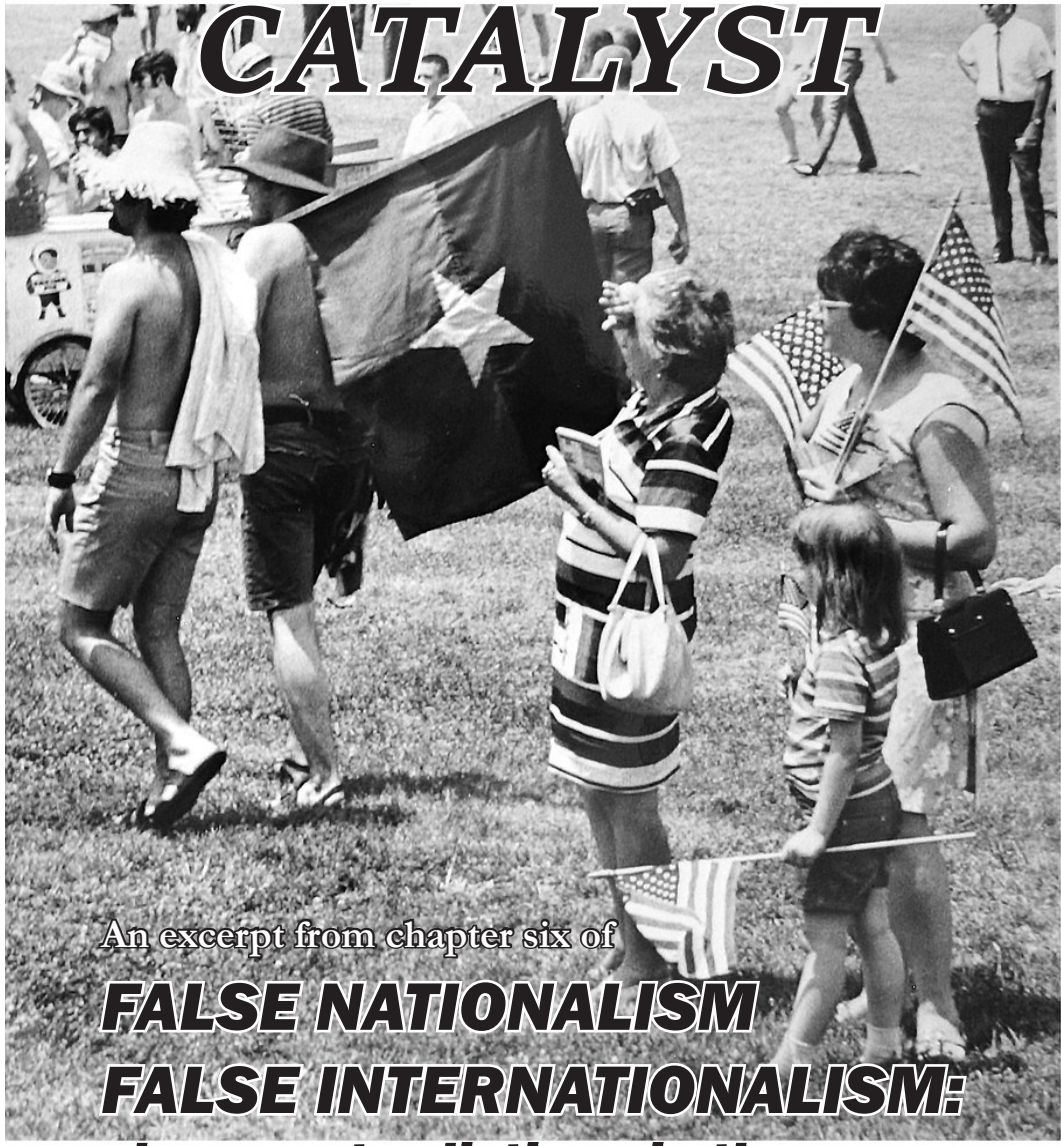
VIETNAM CATALYST



An excerpt from chapter six of

FALSE NATIONALISM FALSE INTERNATIONALISM:

class contradictions in the armed struggle **(1985)**

by **E. Tani & Kaé Sera**

radicals who have found the struggle in the United States itself useless at this time, to go abroad and fight in liberation movements in other countries.") could not play a role in all the new political forces being born in the u.s. oppressor nation. But like other young collectives and revolutionary groupings at that moment, the short-lived RC manifested the new trend of anti-imperialist internationalism.

contingent broke away from the official march route to physically assault the Army recruiting booth in Times Square. The u.s. flag was burned. What was thought extreme in early 1967, a militancy few would take part in, was just foreshadowing what many thousands would be doing within a year.

Revolutionary Contingent's political program, which was heavily influenced by Guevarism, explicitly urged u.s. protesters to join guerrilla movements in the oppressed world:

> "The revolutionary contingent is calling for two things from the dissenters all over the USA. One is the use of creative energy in designing and carrying-out dramatic, radical, peace demonstrations, which will be 'escalated' ... Guerrilla action means fast, destructive actions, from which the perpetrators escape ... This leads to the second call: for persons to join the struggle against U.S. imperialism in other countries. The Revolutionary Contingent has been in contact with representatives of the national liberation movements active on the American continent, and they have consented to call for citizens of the USA to join them (see Che Guevara's 'Message to the Tricontinental'); of course, only those with skills of use to guerrillas—medical and/or technical—and who are willing to fight are wanted ... We can no longer talk—we must fight!"

Obvious problems existed with the RC, from police agent provocateurs using "militant" actions to start fights with other anti-war activists to the RC's inability to work within the broader anti-war movement. And on a larger scale, a program that had no revolutionary answers for here ("The purpose of the Revolutionary Contingent is to enable those American

In the u.s. oppressor nation dissent over the Vietnam War finally grew to the point that it forced the Johnson Administration out of office in 1968, and certainly played a part in limiting imperialism's military options in Southeast Asia. Major contradictions came to light. Robert Williams had noted: "The American mind has been conditions to think of great calamities, wars and revolutionary upheavals as taking place on distant soil. Because of the vast upper and middle classes in the USA, that have grown accustomed to comfortable living, the nation is not prepared for massive violence ... The soft society is highly susceptible to panic."

Just at a time when euro-amerikan youth, with the security of the '60s boom years, were trying to reform settler society, the Government was ordering them to fight in a "dirty" war that was meaningless to them, in remote Asian jungles. To youth searching for justice, nothing seemed less just. The outrage sprang in part from their privileged lives, but was none the less socially explosive. 1965 saw 9,741 appeals of draft status to state appeals boards; 1966 saw 49,718 appeals; 1967 it jumped even higher to 119,167 appeals of draft status. Many thousands of youths were moving to kanada or becoming resisters, while millions were evading the draft on technicalities.

The anti-war movement was the "Civil Rights Movement" of settler college youth. It was their movement, using all that they'd learned from watching the Sit-Ins and the Civil Rights protests. White students gained the intoxicating feeling that what they did was world news, was making world history. Campuses became centers of feverish protest activity. The Vietnam War struggle was a framework that helped foster alternative culture, dissent in all ways from attitudes towards police to language

to consumerism. Revelations over imperialism's immorality changed the way both Government and the major corporations were viewed. When the Harris Poll interviewed college students in June 1970, after the Spring protests over Nixon's invasion of Cambodia, the social shock wave of the '60s could be seen: 67% of the students advocated basic changes in "the system"; 11% said that they were "far left" (19% on the West Coast); 10% said that violence was the only way to change society.

Imperialism's use of violence as an answer, particularly when settler college students themselves began getting beaten up and tear-gassed, gave legitimacy in their eyes to anti-Establishment violence. In particular, any form of disruption or illegal violence against property associated with the military or war industry was applauded. Anti-war ministers assured people that "human rights are more important than property rights." The role of political violence in the student movement was far greater than is now usually admitted. A history of SDS proves how true this was, and in particular outlines how the dimensions of anti-war violence reached a peak in May 1970, after euro-amerikan college students were shot down at Kent State:

> "In the spring of 1968, when bombs were first used by the white left, there were ten bombing instances on campuses; that fall, forty-one; the next spring, eighty-four on campus and ten more off campus; and in the 1969–70 school year (September through May), by an extremely conservative estimate, there were no fewer than 174 major bombings and attempts on campus and at least seventy more off-campus incidents associated with the white left—a rate of roughly one a day.

July 1967 Tom Hayden of SDS declared: **"Urban guerrillas are the only realistic alternative at this time to electoral politics or mass armed resistance."** At the June 1967 SDS Convention at Ann Arbor, National Secretary Greg Calvert said: **"We are working to build a guerrilla force in an urban environment ... Che sure lives in our hearts."** Assistant National Secretary Dee Jacobson agreed: **"We are getting ready for the revolution."** SDS had grown to over 6,000 members (it was to grow much larger in the next year) and linked up anti-war activists on hundreds of campuses. While there was no political leadership, experience, party or strategy, there certainly was an unprecedented current of pro-revolutionary sentiment among euro-amerikan youth.

Within the broader Anti-War movement the idea of revolutionary solidarity, of internationalism, began to grow. When Walter Teague and the U.S. Committee to Aid the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam first began showing up at East Coast peace demonstrations with a large Vietnamese flag, they were called "crazies" by the liberal and pacifist leaders. At first, anti-war marches were supposed to be "American" and "patriotic," politely respectable dissent. The sight of fifteen or twenty youth with an "enemy" flag was shocking.

By early 1967, Teague had joined with John Gerassi, Frank Gillette, and other New Yorkers to organize the Revolutionary Contingent. The RC tried to jack up the militancy of the giant April 15, 1967 anti-war march to the UN (the rally that both King and Carmichael spoke at). Their "contingent" raised the slogan "Support the Vietnamese Revolution" as opposed to the official march slogan of "Stop the War Now." Carrying Vietnamese and other national liberation banners, the small

to life."

The Vietnam War struggle awakened millions of settler youth to political activism and commitment, whether to electoral reform politics or to women's liberation or to socialism. The New Left was born out of this movement. Both armed revolutionary organizations and solidarity with national liberation movements, although numerically small trends, appeared for the first time in the u.s. oppressor nation history in the 1960s. The tragedy is that while there have always been individual euro-amerikan revolutionaries—and even small groups—that supported national liberation, the settler Left parties and trade unions had kept them ineffectually isolated and under control. Until the 1960s.

The New Left that grew out of the anti-war movement only laughed at such old-fashioned backwardness. They had been awed by the power of guerrilla warfare in Vietnam; impressed by the humanism and personal integrity of Che Guevara in a way that they never were by their own Government leaders. Heroic Vietnamese women were an example of women's liberation. By 1967 it was quite common for student activists to talk about armed revolution as the only way to "change the system," as the popularly vague expression went. This generation of settler radicals related to Third World revolutions as novices and students. This was a healthy corrective, necessary for the development of genuinely revolutionary euro-amerikan politics.

Revolutionary sentiments became so popular, although undeveloped, that even student leaders who were completely liberal in their outlook began to speak about armed struggle. In

"The targets, as always, were proprietary and symbolic: ROTC buildings (subjected to 197 acts of violence, from bombings to window breakings, including the destruction of at least nineteen buildings, all of which represented an eight-fold increase over 1968–69), government buildings (at least 232 bombings and attempts from January 1969 to June 1970, chiefly at Selective Service offices, induction centers, and federal office buildings), and corporate offices (now under fire for the first time, chiefly those clearly connected with American imperialism, such as the Bank of America, Chase Manhattan Bank, General Motors, IBM, Mobil, Standard Oil, and the United Fruit Company).

"But the violence wasn't all bombings and burnings. On the campuses this year there were more than 9,408 protest incidents, according to the American Council on Education, another increase over the year before, and they involved police and arrests of no fewer than 731 occasions, with damage to property at 410 demonstrations, and physical violence in 230 instances—sharp evidence that the ante of student protest was being upped. Major outbreaks of violence occurred in November in Washington, when 5,000 people charged the Justice Department and had to be dispelled by massive doses of CN gas (this was the demonstration which Attorney General Mitchell and Weather-leader Bill Ayers both agreed, in totally separate statements with totally different meanings, "looked like the Russian Revolution"); at Buffalo in March when police clashed with students and twelve students were shot and fifty-seven others injured; at Santa Barbara in February, when students kept up a four-day rampage against the university, the National Guard, local police, and the Bank

of America, more than 150 people were arrested, two people were shot, and one student was killed; at Berkeley in April, when 4,000 people stormed the ROTC building, went up against the police, and kept up an hours-long assault with tear gas, bottles, rocks; at Harvard in April, when several thousand people took over Harvard Square, fought police, burned three police cars, trashed banks and local merchants; at Kansas in April, where students and street people caused $2 million worth of damage during several nights of trashing and demonstrations, forcing the calling out of the National Guard; and finally the massive confrontation of May.

"... And for the first time in recent American history, actual guerrilla groups were established, operating in secrecy and for the most part underground, each dedicated to the revolution and each committed to using violent means.

...

"It is important to realize the full extent of the political violence of these years—especially so since the media tended to play up only the most spectacular instances, to treat them as isolated and essentially apolitical gestures, and to miss entirely the enormity of what was happening across the country. It is true that the bombings and burnings and violent demonstrations ultimately did not wreak serious damage upon the state, in spite of the various estimates which indicate that perhaps as much as $100 million was lost in the calendar years 1969 and 1970 in outright damages, time lost through building evacuations, and added expenses for police and National Guardsmen. It is

called, without irony, 'New Left Notes'), and its agents were directed to step up campus operations ..."

It is hard for those who didn't experience those years to grasp how the moral imperative of ending the War sanctioned anti-imperialist violence to millions of euro-amerikans. On the night of August 24, 1970 the Army Math Research Center at the University of Wisconsin at Madison was totally blown up by the anti-war student New Year's Gang. Four years later Karl Armstrong was arrested in kanada for the bombing. At his Toronto extradition hearing, not only professors and businessmen and Vietnam vets turned out to testify for Armstrong, even former u.s. Senator Ernest Gruening of Alaska. Gruening, who committed many colonial crimes in his own career, told the court: **"We should have supported the Viet Cong and the NLF ... Resistance to this war is not only an obligation but a solemn duty of the citizens of this country ... All acts of resistance are fully justified, whatever form they may take."**

Karl Armstrong worked in the 1964 election campaign of Lyndon Johnson. But as he said, the War forced his personal evolution: "In the space of 2–3 years after 1966, I would get flashes of what was happening in Vietnam. At a certain point I really grasped what was going on there, and I wondered what had really happened to me, why I didn't feel that before. I began to really question my own values, my own humanity, what I had become to that point. The revelations in Indochina made me question everything in this country ... I knew it was going to be a very destructive act. I thought that if the bombing of the AMRC would save the life of one Indochinese ... to me that would be worth it. Property doesn't mean anything next

the most for any single month in all the time government records have been kept; in the first week of May, 30 ROTC buildings on college campuses were burned or bombed, at the rate of more than four every single day. And at the end of that first week, 100,000 people went to Washington for a demonstration that was apparently so frustrating in its avowed non-violence that many participants took to the streets after nightfall breaking windows, blocking traffic, overturning trash cans, and challenging the police.

...

"... Despite Hoover's claim on November 19, 1970, that 'we have no special agents assigned to college campuses and have had none,' documents liberated from the FBI office in Media, Pennsylvania, four months later indicate that every single college in the country was assigned an agent and most of them had elaborate informer systems as well. Even as tiny a bureau as the Media one engaged in full-time surveillance and information gathering on every campus its area, sixty-eight in all, ranging from Penn State with its thirty-three thousand students to places like the Moravian Theological Seminary with thirty-five students and the Evangelical Congregational School with forty-one, and it used as its regular campus informers such people as the vice-president, secretary to the registrar, and chief switchboard operator at Swarthmore, a monk at Villanova Monastery, campus police at Rutgers, the recorder at Bryn Mawr, and the chancellor at Maryland State College. As if that was not enough, the FBI added twelve hundred new agents in 1970, mostly for campus work, established a 'New Left desk' (plus an internal information bulletin

also true that they did not create any significant terror or mass disaffiliation from the established system ... in part because Americans generally cannot conceive of violence as a political weapon and tend to dismiss actions outside the normal scope of present politics as so unnecessary and inexplicable as to seem almost lunatic. Nonetheless, the scope of this violence was quite extraordinary. It took place on a larger scale—in terms of the number of incidents, their geographical spread, and the damage caused—than anything seen before in this century. It was initiated by a sizable segment of the population—perhaps numbering close to a million, judging by those who counted themselves revolutionaries and those known to be involved in such acts of public violence as rioting, trashing, assaults upon buildings, and confrontations with the police—and it was supported by maybe as much as a fifth of the population, or an additional 40 million people—judging by surveys of those who approve of violent means or justify it in certain circumstances. And, above all, violence was directed, in a consciously revolutionary process, against the state itself ...

"The culmination of campus violence occurred in May, without doubt one of the most explosive periods in the nation's history and easily the most cataclysmic period in the history of higher education since the founding of the Republic.

"On April 30, Richard Nixon announced that American troops, in contravention of international law and the President's own stated policy, were in the process of invading Cambodia, and within the hour demonstrations began to be mounted on college campuses. Three days

later a call for a national student strike was issued from a mass gathering at Yale, and in the next two days students at sixty institutions declared themselves on strike, with demonstrations, sometimes violent, on more than three dozen campuses. That was remarkable enough, especially for a weekend, but what happened the following day proved the real trigger.

"On May 4, at twenty-five minutes after noon, twenty-eight members of a National Guard contingent at Kent State University, armed with rifles, pistols and a shotgun, without provocation or warning, fired sixty-one shots at random into a group of perhaps two hundred unarmed and defenseless students, part of a crowd protesting the war, ROTC, and the authoritarianism of the university, killing four instantly, the nearest of whom was a football field away, and wounding nine others, one of whom was paralyzed for life from the waist-down. It took only thirteen seconds, but that stark display of government repression sent shock waves reverberating through the country for days, and weeks, and months to come ...

"The impact is only barely suggested by the statistics, but they are impressive enough. In the next four days, from May 5 to May 8, there were major campus demonstrations at the rate of more than a hundred a day, students at a total of at least 350 institutions went out on strike and 536 schools were shut down completely for some period of time, 51 of them for the entire year. More than half the colleges and universities in the country (1,350) were ultimately touched by protest demonstrations, involving nearly 60 percent of the student population—some 4,350,000 people—in

every kind of institution and in every state of the Union.* Violent demonstrations occurred on at least 73 campuses (that was only 4 percent of all institutions but included roughly a third of the country's largest and most prestigious schools), and at 26 schools the demonstrations were serious, prolonged, and marked by brutal clashes between students and police, with tear gas, broken windows, fires, clubbings, injuries and multiple arrests; altogether more than 1800 people were arrested between May 1 and May 15. The nation witnessed the spectacle of the government forced to occupy its own campuses with military troops, bayonets at the ready and live ammunition in the breeches, to control the insurrection of its youth; the governors of Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky, and South Carolina declared all campuses in a state of emergency, and the National Guard was activated twenty-four times at 21 universities in sixteen states, the first time such a massive response had ever been used in a non-racial crisis. Capping all this, there were this month no fewer than 169 incidents of bombings and arson, 95 of them associated with college campuses and another 36 at government and corporate buildings,

* "Protests took place at institutions of every type, secular and religious, large and small, state and private, coeducational and single-sexed, old and new. Eighty-nine percent of the very selective institutions were involved, 91 percent of the state universities, 96 percent of the top fifty most prestigious and renowned universities, and 97 percent of the private universities; but there were also demonstrations with a "significant impact" reported at 55 percent of the Catholic institutions, 52 percent of the Protestant-run schools, and 44 percent of the two-year colleges, all generally strict and conservative schools which had never before figured in student protest in any noticeable way. Full details can be found in a study by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 'May 1970: the Campus Aftermath of Cambodia and Kent State.'"